Decentralization and New Territorial Policies in France and Spain. A Bottom up Approach

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the current analysis of local government in Europe tends to adopt a top down perspective. The analysis concentrates on the devolution process from central governments to local communities. The main question is to what extent do central administrations give local autonomy to other levels of administration? Even if this issue remains very important, the analysis of local government in Europe needs to take into account new elements and new dynamics. This result of the institutionalisation of decentralisation frameworks and the development of European integration both complicate the study of local government. New institutions, particularly regional and European institutions, are now able to influence local government and to participate in the reshaping of national territorial organisations in the European Union.

From a comparative study of new territorial development policies in two French regions, Brittany and Centre, and one Spanish region, Galicia¹, this paper tries to evaluate the development of new territorial policies since the second half of the 1990’s. The context of local government has undergone profound changes in these two countries. Regional institutions produce public policies, which affect territorial organisation and local policy-making in France and in Spain. These innovating policies aim to transform local governance by structuring new local institutions, new territorial references and new rules of collective action (Bielza 1993; Faure 1995; Fernandez 1993; Oudart 1997; Pasquier 2000). They adopt common inter-communal spaces, called “pays” in France and “comarcas” in Spain, which are intermediary levels between the commune and the province². Co-produced by different government levels, these policies are symptomatic of the local governance transformations in France and Spain, with notably the emergence of new local actors (professional associations, citizens associations, and development agencies).

¹ Empirical data come from my PhD thesis (Pasquier 2000). In a part of this work, I carried out a comparative study on the regional programmes of territorial planning in Brittany (Programmes régionaux d’aménagement du territoire – PRAT), the contracts of county (contrats de pays) in Centre and the programmes of county development (programa de desarollo comarcal). And currently I am extending my research to the county policy in Catalonia.
² The French pays and the Spanish comarca correspond to the county in UK and the Kreis in Germany.
So my analysis is organised in three directions:

- First, we will see how these policies are implemented and if it is possible to identify some convergence into the policy-making of these regional territorial policies. What are policy norms of local development? Can we see forms of convergence through these new territorial regional policies? Could we identify an Europeanization of local government policies?

- Secondly, we shall analyse the territorial policy impact compared to the territorial organisation in France and in Spain. Does the institutionalisation of new local spaces produce conflicts between the different government levels? What are the political effects of these territorial policies?

- Thirdly, we shall study the concrete structuring of these new territories. New territorial institutions and communities are being built in France and Spain. Politicians, citizens or professional associations have the possibility of working together at “pays” or “comarca” level. So what? Do we see the building of new supra-communal interests? Could we identify a transformation of political participation at local level?

NEW TERRITORIAL POLICY-MAKING: A BOTTOM UP EUROPEANIZATION?

In France and in Spain, regional institutions are intermediary levels, that is to say they are both in charge of local problems and partners of national and European administrations (Balme 1998). This strategic location for local development explains why French and Spanish regional actors, which have now a political capacity, have gradually elaborated and implemented new territorial policies.

The national and European inheritance

The inheritance of national and European programs of local development has been very important for the socialisation of French and Spanish regional actors. To
implement their own programmes, regional institutions now use this inheritance in order to make their own policies.

The paradigm of local development has a long history. Its theoretical origins came from the criticism of productivist logic during the 1950s and the 1960s (Joyal 1987; Pecqueur 1989). At the end of the 1960s, left theorists adopted this paradigm whenever new problems and new needs emerged in towns and campaigns of West Europe (Le Galès 1993). Gradually, since the beginning of the 1970s, Local development policies have been implemented by different authorities in order to face the crisis of centralist policies of regional planning (Madiot 1996; Pérez Andres 1998).

In France, agricultural trades unions first promulgated this paradigm in the rural environment during the 1960s before it being diffused in urban areas. In this way, in the first half of the 1970s the French central administration through the DATAR (Délégation à l’aménagement du territoire et à l’action régionale) implemented the contracts of pays to resolve rural exodus reinforcing solidarity between actors of the local society (DATAR 1977). At the end of the 1970s the pays fashion declines but, from the beginning of the 1980s, the decentralisation facilitated the implementation of new experiences of local development soon as, in 1983, the “inter-communal charts of development and planning” (Chartes intercommunales de développement et d’aménagement) or touristic contracts at county level (contrats de pays d’accueil).

In Spain, this paradigm was diffused during the democratic transition in the regions in which identity was strong as it is in Catalonia. In these regions, local development was perceived as a means to struggle against the centralism inherited from Francoism (Vazquez Barquero 1996). Moreover, Spain’s entry in the European Community, in 1986, incited local and regional actors to organise in order to benefit European programs. In this way, Institutes of community development (Institutos de desarrollo comunautario) were created.

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3 At the beginning of the 1970s, the franquist central administration also studied to what extent it was possible to use the “comarca” as a scale for an administrative reform (Ameijeiras Castro 1973)

4 In Madrid, Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela.
At the end of the 1980s, the European Commission implemented new local development programmes through the reform of the structural funds. The LEADER programme is the best known. With LEADER programme, local actors are incited to co-operate around a territorial development project. “Local action groups” were selected and have to implement LEADER programmes by regrouping social, economic actors and administrative authorities in territories (Smith 1996). Moreover, the LEADER programme incorporates a transnational dimension. A LEADER network links all the Groups of Local Action, giving birth to a “European problematique of local development” (Muller 1996: 312). LEADER 1 and LEADER 2 have been a great success in the European Union, particularly in France and Spain.

**European convergence of local development norms**

According to Theodor Lowi typology (1972), these new territorial policies can be defined as “constitutive policies”, that is to say policies defining rules of the game between legitimate actors who deal with a specific problem. There are the PRAT in Brittany, the county contracts in Centre or the county development plans in Galicia, territorial policies have two common objectives, territorial planning and territorial organisation. Comparative analysis demonstrates that French and Spanish regional administrations implement territorial policies, which display very similar principles of action. The convergence of these rules of action in differentiated regional configuration indicates the Europeanization of territorial development policy instruments in France and Spain (Pasquier 2001a).

**New territories for local development**

Regional administrations contribute through these policies to shape new territorial communities by integrating several municipalities and creating intermediary levels between communes and province, the pays in France, the comarcas in Spain.

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5 Seminars, training are organised for local animators facilitating the emergence of common repertoires.

6 For LEADER 1, the European Commission selected 217 projects in the European Union from which 52 were in Spain and 40 in France (Smith 1996).
For instance, in Galicia, the county development act (Ley de desarrollo comarcal) adopted in June 1996, defines the *comarca* as “an intermediary territorial framework between the municipality and the province shaped by a set of nearby municipalities which have an internal coherence based on historical, economic or functional facts”.

In Brittany, Centre and Galicia regional administrations define territorial spaces respecting or creating local uses of co-operation. Moreover in the three regions, the territorial spaces have to be economically viable and to show a quite important social unity. So, they try to associate one urban pole to the rural environment by adopting inter-communal spaces as a territorial frame. The *pays* and the *comarcas* respect also a demographic threshold. For example, in Centre, 25 000 inhabitants is the minimal threshold to create a pays. Counties have to represent a sufficient socio-economic space to permit local development. Actually Brittany is divided into twenty counties and Centre into 31. To delimit these territories regional administrations co-operated with the State administration. In Spain, the situation is different because the regional governments have more administrative resources. In 1991, the Galician government has created a specific administration, the “*sociedad de desarrollo comarcarl*” (SDC)\(^7\) which has been charged to divide the Galicia into counties. In 20 February 1997, a regional decision officialized the Galicia’s parcelling into 53 *comarcas*.

**A stabilised partnership**

French and Spanish regions do not only delimit new territories for local development but they also organise economic and political local actors around this challenge. Regional administrations institutionalise a partnership with local actors. If the degrees of institutionalisation of this partnership vary among the regions, two constant elements compose it: administrative structures and development agents.

In Brittany, the policy implemented by the regional council is the least institutionalised. The PRAT program is based on the great density level of inter-communal structures and economic development agencies at the local which have

\(^7\) This service consists of geographers, urbanists and economists staff administred by the “*secretario general de la planificación y del desarrollo comarcal*”, Andres Precedo Ledo, himself directly linked to the presidency of the regional government (the *Xunta*).
been diffused co-operation norms\textsuperscript{8} since the 1960s (Allain and Baudelle 1995). In each territory the regional council is associated with a partner structure which implement local development project. It can be an association (the GALCOB in the west centre Brittany), an urban district (county of Lorient in the south of Brittany) an inter-communal structure or a local development agency (territory of Lannion in the north west of Brittany). Moreover, the regional council imposed the shaping of informal structures, named “local comities of co-ordination”, which group local politicians and local socio-economic representatives. One regional councillor manages these committees.

In Centre and Galicia the policy is more institutionalised. In Centre, the regional council has imposed that each pays contracting to the region has to be organised as a “Public establishment of inter-communal co-operation” (\textit{Etablissement public de coopération intercommunale} – \textit{EPCI}). The municipalities that want to obtain one county contract have to regroup into one EPCI and have to recruit a development agent\textsuperscript{9}. In Galicia, the SDC creates county foundations (\textit{fundaciones comarcales}) in each \textit{comarca}. In these foundations, the director organ is composed of one regional deputy, one provincial deputy, all the mayors of the \textit{comarca}, one representative of the SDC and socio-economic representatives. Last, a development agent is charged to implement the development project of the \textit{comarca}. In 1998, 26 county foundations had been already created (Barreiro Rivas 1997; Precedo Ledo 1997)

\textit{Territorial development project}

The last common policy principle is the development project. All regional territorial policies have the same objective, the struggle against territorial economic

\textsuperscript{8} At the end of the 1960s, in Brittany, various political and economic actors structured committees of local development: the “\textit{Société d’économie mixte d’études du nord-Finistère}” (SEMF) in 1963 by Alexis Gourvennec, the “comité d’expansion économique de Cornouailles” in 1964 by Louis Le Pensec, the “comité d’expansion du Mené” (CEM) by Paul Houée in 1965, the “comité de coordination et d’aménagement du pays de Redon” (COCAPAR) in 1969 and the “comité interdépartemental de développement économique du centre-ouest Bretagne” in 1970.

\textsuperscript{9} In Centre, two regional councillors are county members and the regional council participates to the county budget.
inequalities. To realise this aim, regional institutions do not use sectoral programmes but a global strategy of development. With this principle of project development, regional institution try to give development tools to each territory in order for them to create territorial project communities. These territorial project communities seem to be able to generate endogenous development.

So, regional administrations and local actors jointly elaborate regional programmes of territorial planning in Brittany, the development charts of county in Centre, and the county development plans in Galicia. Each programme is based on a demographic and economic territorial balance from which development priorities emerge for a plurianual period. For a period of years, regional administrations leave policy sectoral logic to adopt project logic (Duran 1999). Then, the flexibility of these programmes permits the actors to deal with differentiated problems. Each territory, each pays, each comarca by evaluating its own priorities, by shaping common interests tend to build new territorial communities.

NEW TERRITORIAL POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICTS

More broadly, these policies participate in a process of transformation of the territorial political exchanges lead by French and Spanish regional elites. They permit the regions to stabilise relations of co-operation with local actors organised into supra-communal spaces. However, in these two countries, these innovative policies produce institutional conflicts at two levels: at the regional level and at the central level. These institutional conflicts reflect the transformations generated by the new territorial policies and the reshaping of national territorial organisations (Gaxie 1997).

Sub-regional conflicts

These new territorial policy principles create new frameworks of interactions, which participate in the “Modernisation” and of Local Government. Indeed, by institutionalising new territorial spaces, regional elites try to establish new
relations between regional administrations and local actors and are transforming traditional territorial exchanges.

Regional political leaders who support these policies have similar characteristics. In Centre and Brittany, regional councillors who support these policies cross the left-right cleavage. They have the same political repertoires based on their socio-economic know-how and their capacity to control public policies (Genieys et Smith 1998; Grémion et Muller 1990). They are also regionalist that is to say they want to increase the regional political capacity. It is notably the case in Galicia where the regional government consists of the Galician popular party (PPG) it opposes to other sectors of this party who are attached to a territorial organisation bases on the province.

So, in our three regions, these policies produce sub-regional conflicts, which put in oppositions regional institutions and provincial institutions.

In France, the emergence of the pays produces conflicts between regional councils and provincial councils (conseils généraux). However, the intensity of conflicts varies among regions. By the way, the comparison between Brittany and Centre is enlightening. In Brittany, the local co-operation was already developed and general councils accept the regional council leadership in territorial policy. In contrast, in Centre, the general councils have been opposed to the regional policy. In this region, the municipal fragmentation has always reinforced the territorial domination of the provincial council. So, the provincial council of Indre-et-Loire even refused initially to see the implementation of the regional policy on its territory. And all the provincial councils composing Centre imposed a condition that the pays respect the territorial

Moreover in Galicy, this policy is a means for the regional government to occupy the political space of the nationalist party – the Galician nationalist Bloc - (Bloque nacionalista galego). This party, which is the second regional political force, centres its discourse on the reconquest of regional identity. So, as the comarca has been a traditional claim of nationalist parties in Galicia during the twentieth century, this territorial policy traduces the regionalization of the regional government repertoires (Pasquier 2001b; Yebra Martul-Ortega 1993).

It is in Brittany that the first community of municipalities was born in France (Nevers 1998).

In Centre, only 9% of the municipalities are integrated into inter-communal structures with their own taxation (EPCI) against 64% in Brittany, the national average being 31,4%.
frames of the provinces. Several pays have tried to work in inter-provincial logic without success.

In the same way, in Galicia, the regional organisation of counties represents a risk for the territorial domination of provincial councils (diputaciones provinciales). Provinces remain the main financiers of rural municipalities through provincial plans of equipment (Alvarez Corbacho 1995). As the county policy generates municipal regrouping and public rationalisation, this policy deeply transforms territorial exchanges and the role of provincial councils. So, even if this policy is one of the emblematic programs of the regional government, it will allow for some flexibility. Initially, this policy should have institutionalised the comarca as a new scale of public administration with legal status as in Catalonia (Cassasas 1993). But the regional government has been constrained to choose another solution under the pressures of the provincial councils and by some barons of the Galician popular party (PPG), that is to say the government party. The county development act recognises the comarca as an historic entity but does not give it any administrative existence. It is only a new space for local development and the co-ordination of local and regional programmes. This opposition between regional government and provinces continued during the delimitation of the comarcas because they did not respect some political territories. During the process of county’s delimitation 49 comarcas were initially delimited by the SDC. However, the final result has been quite different with the officialization of the county map composed of 53 comarcas, because some political leaders forced to the regional administration that it respects their political territory.

**Territorial Policies and Central Regulations**

Faced to these changes, central administrations in France and Spain develop different strategies.

In France, the central administration is regulating the local and regional experiences by law. Indeed, since the beginning of the Fifth Republic, some French politicians and high ranking civil servants would like to transform the French territorial administration at two levels, the regional level and the county level, both by eliminating provinces and regrouping municipalities (Le Lidec 1997). The
regionalization referendum in 1969 and the municipal fusion law in 1971 were the first such attempts (Novarina and Martin 1988). So, as it was very difficult to reform the administrative map with voluntary acts, the French central administration prefers now to create gradually co-operation tools, which have already been experimented at the regional level. The central government is trying to use these new territories to promote a long-term administrative reshaping of territorial organisation. The aim is gradually make municipal amalgamation and to have a better balance between administrative territory, economic space and public policy (Commissariat général au Plan 1993; DATAR 1996).

Since the beginning of the 1990s several Acts have been voted in this way. The LADDT act, named Voynet’s Act regionalized the emergence of the pays. A regional conference of territorial planning composed by State administration representatives and regional councillors is tasked with controlling the formation of the “pays” (Leurquin 1999). Moreover, regional councils and the central government co-financed the building of county and agglomerations structures through the 2000-2006 State-region planning (Contrat de plan Etat-régions). In Centre and in Brittany, the regional council and the central administration co-finance the institutionalisation of the pays respectively with 200 millions/f and 400 millions/f.

In Spain, the central administration strategy has been completely different. The central government has not accepted the regionalization of local government and the territorial organisation. For this reason, the central government is promoting a new reform, the Local Pact (Pacto local). Negotiated in 1997-1998 between the central government and the Spanish federation of municipalities and provinces (Federación española de los municipios y de las provincias FEMP), this reform aims to bring back into balance the relations between Autonomous Communities and Municipalities.

13 The Regional and Territorial Administration Act in 1992 (loi ATR), the Regional Planning Act in 1995 (loi d’orientation sur l’aménagement du territoire LOADT) and in 1999 (loi d’orientation sur l’aménagement durable du territoire). The debates of each law have shown the opposition between politicians who are in favour of inter and supra-communal co-operation and those who are status quo followers (Le Saout 1997).

14 In 1998, Spanish local administration (municipalities and provinces) expenditures amounted to 13.6% of all public expenditure against 26.1% for autonomous communities.
(Rodriguez Alvarez 1998). In April 1999, several Acts have been voted in order to empower municipalities and provincial councils: reinforcing of mayor role; constitutional possibility for local governments to preserve their autonomy; and delegation of some competencies from to the State to local governments.

However, the future of the Local Pact depends on Autonomous Communities. Indeed, they have the majority of competencies, which could be devolved to local governments. So, the central government objective is the conclusion of Local Pacts in each Autonomous Community. As in many public sectors in Spain, the regulation by political parties is very strong (Pasquier 1997). All depends on the capacity of central politics parties the Socialist party (PSOE) and the Popular party (PP) to impose the Local Pact on political regional agendas. This process varies among regional configurations and the permeability of regional political agendas to national stakes. For instance, in Galicia, the regional government tried to transform the Local Pact. The regional administration tends to limit the devolution of competencies to municipalities and to empower through these negotiations the shaping of urban counties. The regional government aim is to always control the local development policies.

THE SHAPING OF NEW TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES?

The new local communities are more or less institutionalised according to national and regional contexts. Could we identify new forms of local democracy through these territorial policies? In some French and Spanish regions, they become the main local interlocutors of regional and central administrations about different issues such as economic development, public investments, environmental or tourism programs. The shaping of new territorial communities depends on many factors: (i) the institutional structure at the local level; (ii) the pre-existing local identity (iii) the joint impact of European programs. Indeed, the impact of these regional territorial policies is all the more important if they are combined with European programmes. In our three regions regional territorial policies and the LEADER programme are in constant interaction, generating or consolidating local dynamics.
In Brittany, the regional territorial policy participates in the inter-communality empowerment which is already well structured. Indeed, Brittany has a long tradition of local development dynamics. Indeed, the mobilisation of the regional elites in the “Comité d’études et de liaison des intérêts bretons (CELIB)”, from the 1950s to the 1970s, produced also the structuring of local groups (Pasquier 2000). So, in several territories, regional policy has reactivated local solidarity. For instance, in the centre of Brittany, the GALCOB (Local action group of the west centre Brittany), which is transforming into the pays of the west centre Brittany aggregates in an inter-provincial territory\textsuperscript{15} 112 municipalities and 110 000 inhabitants. In order to adapt its structure to these organisational transformations, State administration has created co-ordination service in the centre of Brittany. So, now this county is the main interlocutor of the different levels of government, managing European, national and regional programs of local development. However, in some cases the regional policy failed to join local actors. In the east centre of Brittany, regional administration wanted to aggregate in the same territory two middle towns, Loudéac and Pontivy, located in two various provinces. This strategy has not succeeded because the rivalries between urban and provincial political leaders were too strong. So, actually two counties are structuring around each town.

In Centre, the challenges are quite different. The county’s contracts are a means for regional institutions to develop inter-communality because in this region communal co-operation is largely under-developed. The communal fragmentation is a great obstacle in the implementation of local development policies. Even if in Centre the “pays” are smaller than in Brittany, this policy facilitates the emergence of the development of local associationism. The appearance of new socio-economic actors has renewed the local elites. Moreover creation of inter-communal public structures and the recruitment of development agents permit the socialisation of local actors towards new norms of action. Then, several local structures of development in Centre manage actually LEADER II programme whereas they have been unable to obtain LEADER I programme. Between these two periods the local actors have learnt the new rules of collective action. Also, in Centre, a regional association of pays was born. This association is appearing as an important territorial interlocutor for the

\textsuperscript{15} This territory crosses three provinces, the Côtes d’Armor, the Morbihan and the Finistère.
regional council. For the negotiations of the 2000-2006 State-region planning, the regional council consulted this association in order to local problems really emerge.

The Galician case is similar because the county development programme tries to limit the effects of localism. That is to say limit the permanent competition between mayors and municipalities, limiting the co-ordination of local policies. In this context, local actors are used to have individual strategies. For instance, in Galicia, this type of conflict has paralysed the majority of inter-communal structures -the mancocomunidades –. With the county development policy the situation changes. This policy imposes on actors a collective partnership through the county foundation. So, progressively this policy shapes new types of relations between the mayors. A new form of collective action is emerging. For example, in the comarca of “O Salnes” the activity of local associations in cultural, tourism and economic domains increased by 300 % between 1995 and 1996. In other comarcas, as in Bergantiños or Valdeorras, the foundations substituted to inter-communal structures. And an increasing number of mayors ask for the fusion of these structures.

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The context of decentralisation and of European integration changes our perception of local government. The analysis only describes the relations between central administrations and local communities. New institutions influence the national reshaping of local government. If we really want to understand these transformations, it is necessary to complete the top down approach by a bottom up perspective. As I tended to show in this paper, regional institutions in France and in Spain have the political capacity to implement territorial policies which participate to the reshaping of local government

Moreover, this comparative analysis shows the gradual convergence between Spanish and French territorial policies in a context of decentralization. In France, central administration is giving more possibility to the regions to organise the collective

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16 See Fundacion para o desenvolvemento da comcarca do Valdeorras, Memorias de actividades 1997, Xunta de Galicia.
action at local level. And in Spain, central administration is trying to weaken the regional centralisation by conceding more capacity for action to local government. Is not there clear evidence a bottom up Europeanization not taking place?
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